

A HOUSE IS NOT A HOME!

Today's Text: Psalms 127 and 128

Extracts:

1. *Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so He gives His beloved sleep. Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward [Ps. 127: 1-3]*
2. *When you eat the labour of your hands, you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine. In the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants all around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord [Ps. 128: 2-4]*

*Zsa Zsa Gabor is a Hungarian-born American actress who is better known for her divorce record. She was Miss Hungary in 1936. During the Second World War, she migrated to the United States where she met and married a millionaire in 1942. Between that first marriage and 1986, when she married her current husband, she was divorced eight times! One of her popular jokes is "I am a marvelous **housekeeper**. Every time I leave a man, I keep **his house**."¹*

*In that story, we see a good **home breaker** calling herself a good **housekeeper**! Interestingly, she lived on the average with one husband every five years (collecting houses!) between 1942 and 1986. However, for the last eighteen years, she has remained with the same man. Has she finally found a home or become too old and tired to keep moving? She was 68 years old in 1986, a relatively young age by American longevity standards, and still an active actress at the time. Therefore, we can assume that she has found a home at last.*

*That begs the question: is a house the same thing as a home? If they are not the same thing, what makes them different? Under what circumstances can we use them interchangeably? In today's lesson, we shall use **Psalms 127 and 128** to study and understand the subject.*

¹ "Humorous Quotes attributed to Zsa Zsa Gabor," www.workinghumor.com/quotes/asz_zsa_gabor.shtml

1. Houses have stars homes have teams!

The year 2004 has been called the year of the underdog in team sports. Here are a few examples:

- ❑ At the recently concluded Olympic games in Athens, the United States basketball team, the “dream team,” was beaten in the preliminaries by lowly Puerto Rico, and wound up with a bronze medal. Earlier in the year, in the highly competitive American NBA Championship Finals, the star-studded Los Angeles Lakers (winners of three championships in the last four years) was humiliated 1-4 by the Detroit Pistons with no known stars.
- ❑ In the *Euro 2004* football tournament, unheralded Greece won the trophy. The giant teams from Germany, France, Italy and England did not make the semi-final!
- ❑ In the Ryder Cup (a golf tournament held every two years between Europe and America), Europe handed America its worst defeat in the over 70-year history of the event, in spite of the Tiger Woods on the American side.

How do we interpret that? It is simply that *in team sports, teams and not stars win!* Colin Montgomery, a member of the European team for the 2004 Ryder Cup, made this point quite vividly. Asked why his team won the tournament, he responded, “The American team played for their country *but we played for each other.*”² In other words, the Europeans had *team spirit* that was fuelled by *mutual understanding* and *respect, cooperation* and *collaboration*. The same point has been made by Paul when he wrote to the Philippians, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, *but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interest, but also for the interests of others*” [Phil. 2: 3-4].

An average house consists of the *hardware* (building and equipment, including furnishing) and the *software* (the human beings who live in it). Unless building codes prevent it, human beings like to express their uniqueness through the design and finishing of their houses. The shape and size of houses in highbrow, low-density neighbourhoods are markedly different from the cramped and same-looking houses that you may find in inner city projects. Even within urban areas, people would still want to reflect their individuality. For example, in Dublin, Republic of Ireland, no two front doors of apartments in the same building are painted alike! Therefore, to a large extent, stars occupy houses. Stars are *individuals* (if single occupiers) or *parents* or *siblings*. The fight for territorial integrity is rife. For example, the man wants to be the unquestioned boss, his wife resents it and fights back and the children suffer the consequences. Issues are always centred on *rights* and *entitlements*. As a result, loneliness, selfishness, alienation, domestic violence, abuse, separation or divorce, among others, are quite common. Such a house cannot stand.

² <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2004/golf/09/12/bc.glf.rydercup.montgom.ap/index.html>

However, when the stars subordinate themselves to the *general good* of all, *team spirit* is created, which leads to building a *home*. In a home, everybody is his/her brother's keeper, so to speak. There is open communication. There is consultation. Collaboration and cooperation, concern and caring radiate. All these create an enabling environment of *shared love*. Then, the home becomes the training ground for children, a city of refuge for the prodigal, and a sanctuary for the distressed. Such a home can withstand any storms of life.

Examine your situation right now. Be honest about it. Do you have a house or a home? No matter your answer, this lesson is important for all of us. If you have only a house, how can you turn it into a home? If you already have a home, how can you make it a better one? Let us turn to Psalms 127 and 128 for guidance.

2. The building blocks of a home

With the forgoing in mind, we can define a house as the physical structure and furnishing of our residences *plus* the people who live in it. You may own, lease or rent. The important thing is that you live there. A home is the *quality of life* that obtains in our residences, which may have little to do with the material affluence (or lack of it). For example, you may find a large family cramped in a deteriorating house and yet they are happier than a small family living in a luxurious self-detached house in the rich part of town. What then are the building blocks of a home?

According to the first of the two psalms under consideration, “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain who build it” [Ps. 127: 1]. For God to be the architect and builder of your house, it means that He is the designer and the contractor.

When we hire professionals to design and build our houses, we give them specifications and guidelines. However, they can advise us on how to make what we want better articulated. When Jesus gave the parable of two builders, the difference between the foolish and the wise ones lay in the *foundation*. While the wise one built his foundation on a rock (a figure of the Christ-see 1 Cor. 10: 4), the foolish one built his own on sand (i.e., human standards). Later, when both of them were faced with the same storms of life, only the house of the wise one remained standing [Matt. 7: 24-27].

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom “and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” [Prov. 9: 10]. The Scriptures also say, “through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches” [Prov. 24: 3-4]. Wisdom, knowledge and understanding are gifts of the Holy Spirit [1 Cor. 12: 8]. *Therefore, the person “who fears the Lord (and) walks in His ways” [Ps. 128: 1] has accepted*

God as the Architect and Builder of his/her house, which then becomes a solid home!

How can we demonstrate the fear of the Lord in our houses so as to convert them into homes? The psalmist has given us some good leads:

a) *Accept children*

We are told, “*children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are children of one’s youth*” [Ps. 127: 3-4].

Marriage is not compulsory [Matt. 19: 10-12]. However, if you believe that you cannot exercise self-control, it is better to get married [1 Cor. 7: 7-9]. The institution of marriage is very important to God because it is through it that He wants the human race to be perpetuated. After creating Adam and Eve in His image and likeness, God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it” [Gen. 1: 28]. Following the destruction of life by flood, God renewed the covenant to Noah and his sons when He said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” [Gen. 9: 1].

What we find these days, even among believers, is a *deliberate choice* to avoid having children while “blessing” the marriage with a multitude of dogs and cats! Economic necessity and popular culture may account for that, to a large extent. However, children are a blessing from the Lord. As God promised the children of Israel, “no one shall suffer miscarriage or *be barren* in your land” [Ex. 23: 25]. You can apply your sound mind to choose the number and spacing of children. But, if you refuse them *totally*, you are living in disobedience, with its spiritual consequences.

Let me illustrate with my experience. When Ibhate and I got married, it was our desire to have a very small family of two children and no more because we both came from very large families. During her first pregnancy, she had to take unpaid leave from her job for eight months because she was sick most of the time. During her second pregnancy, she lost a whole semester at the university because she was in the hospital from the 24th week. Having been lucky with two live births under such circumstances (who turned out to be a girl and a boy!), *commonsense* and our personal desires suggested that that was enough. However, the Lord sent through a prophet that we still owed Him “a son who shall be the cement of your house.” In *obedience*, we tried for a third pregnancy, which turned out to be the most difficult. From the 6th to the 36th week, my wife was hospitalized. Happily, the product of that pregnancy is today a wonderful young man in his twenties who has been a major spiritual pillar

in our home. Looking back now, I am glad that we built on the rock of faith in God instead of on the sand of human logic.

b) *Build an open home*

The Psalmist adds, “Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine *in the very heart of your house*, your children like olive plants *all around your table*” [Ps. 128: 3]. Where is “the very heart of your house”? Jesus has said that where your treasure is, there your heart will be also [Matt. 6: 21]. The heart of a God-centred family is the fear of the Lord. When we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, all other material blessings shall be added [Matt. 6: 33]. Can you then imagine the joy and love that radiate in this house where the wife is like a fruitful vine and the children are like olive plants around the table?

That suggests that the family shares things in common. The members study the Bible together, pray together, and eat together. There is mutual respect. They discuss common issues together and resolve differences openly together. When one member suffers, every member suffers. When one member achieves, every member celebrates. Parents lead by example and children follow by trust and appreciation. The family acquires a culture, which is shared by all its members. If as a result of modern living, they cannot meet in one place, they can still communicate by telephone or e-mail *routinely*. Therefore, it is possible and practicable for those *who trust in God* to build an open and loving home.

c) *Share the fruits and blessings with your community*

After God has built many such homes in the same community, He also guards them as the watchman. What then follows? First, people can go about their business without fear, enjoy their meals and have sound sleep at the end of each day [Ps. 127: 2]. Satan and his wicked angels, manifesting as “the enemies in the gate” [v. 5] will be scared to attack such people. The residents of the homes, city and country will enjoy the fruits of their labour. They become happy and all is always well with them [Ps. 128: 2]. The inhabitants of the city and country will be blessed all the days of their long lives. The whole country will enjoy peace [vv. 5-6].

The opposite is more true of many communities and countries around the world today. When political leaders and professionals who are supposedly believers are the ones who perpetrate white-collar crimes, run abortion clinics or defend same-sex marriages in courts, what fruits from their homes are they sharing with others in their communities and countries? Understandably, therefore, criminal activities have shot up. We are more afraid than ever before. We can hardly sleep well. In spite of the fact that

material affluence has significantly improved, *spiritual poverty* is at its worst. How can there be peace?

3. Conclusion

To win the war of personal happiness and salvation, and national peace and prosperity, the family is the nucleus and a God-fearing home is the arrowhead. The family is made up mainly of a father, a mother and their children. Even though the word of God says, “a righteous man regards the life of his animals” [Prov. 12: 10], that does not make pets equal to or replacements for children! God expects us to raise our children in the fear of the Lord so that when they grow up, they will know the right things to do [Prov. 22: 6], one of which is how to raise their own children. Much as we value our independence and freedom, we should always remember this: *everyone wants to be left alone but nobody wants to be lonely!*

It is never too late to convert your house into a home. Try the following:

- ❑ Do stocktaking right away. How much room does God have in your house and heart? You have a living room, a dining area, a study/computer room, toilet facilities and bedrooms. Each of these places is earmarked for the prescribed purpose. But where is the “closet” where you commune with your Father in heaven [Matt. 6: 6]? When Paul wrote his epistles, in several places, he would greet the people and “the church that is in their house” [Rom. 16: 3,5; Col. 4: 15]. Do you have a church or chapel or prayer room in your house?³
- ❑ Examine your family life. Does the husband respect his wife in the presence of the children and *vice versa*? Do the parents show good example to their children? Do the children honour and obey their parents? Do you use blessing or curse words in your conversations and exchanges? Is there any evidence of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in your house?

When the storms of life strike a home that is run on human vanity, family cohesion will collapse and family members will go their separate ways even when they live under the same roof. On the other hand, a home that fears God will remain standing and steady, no matter the strength and frequency of such storms.

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³ For more on this subject, read “The Church in your House,” *Weekly Bible Study Series*, Vol. 2, No. 31: 9 December 2001